



Strategic Plan



2023–2027

Acknowledgements

The Western Australian Centre for Rural Health acknowledges the Traditional Owners of our land and pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Using the term - Aboriginal

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the First Nations people of Australia. The term Aboriginal is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander by First Nations people in Western Australia, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia. No disrespect is intended to our Torres Strait Islander colleagues and community.





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Foreword



The Western Australian Centre for Rural Health (WACRH) was the first University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) in Western Australia, and we are proud of our record of building and sustaining engagement with multiple stakeholders and serving the rural communities in our regions.

We have steadily grown over the last two decades, making the most of additional investment by government in infrastructure and staffing. WACRH staff have responded magnificently to these opportunities and the challenges associated with rapid growth, developing an expanded range of programs that contribute to our regional communities and supporting a diverse range of health students. We are delighted to have had good retention of staff, stability which has been valuable as they continue to develop and share their skills and knowledge with others. We value our Aboriginal staff and their support in helping us work more effectively with Aboriginal people and communities.

Mindful of the need to expose students to more remote environments where health workforce shortages are greatest, we are developing more of our training programs beyond the regional cities of Geraldton and Karratha to offer a range of innovative rural placement experiences. We maintained our programs in remote settings during the early challenging years of COVID-19 and are poised and committed to increase further our contribution in remote underserved locations.

We have embraced working across the rural health pipeline but there is much more to do, particularly in supporting the existing health workforce and encouraging Aboriginal people into health careers.

In concert with our efforts at quality teaching and learning have been our continued efforts in research and evaluation to ensure that we embrace innovation and make a difference to our communities. More collaborative research is being undertaken with other UDRH colleagues.

We recognise that health therapies alone will be insufficient to overcome health inequities. Social and structural determinants of health must inform approaches to improving the health of those living in our regional, rural and remote regions.

Our work is underpinned by our organisational teamwork and our collaborations and partnerships with external agencies. We are also delighted with the relationships we have built across our host school within the University of Western Australia (UWA), the School of Allied Health (SAH), and their enthusiastic endorsement of rural training for students and opportunities for staff collaboration. We recognise that this alignment of thinking and harmonising our efforts with others is what underpins achieving our mission and ensuring we maximise value from the resources we are entrusted with.

Professor Sandra Thompson
Director, Western Australian Centre for Rural Health

Our Story

The WA Centre for Rural Health (WACRH) was established in 1998 as one of six University Departments of Rural Health (UDRH) across Australia. There are now 19 UDRHs around Australia funded under the Federal government's Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training (RHMT) program, with three other UDRHs in the Kimberley, Goldfields and Southwest regions of Western Australia.

The overall goal of the RHMT program is to improve the recruitment and retention of medical, nursing, dental and allied health professionals in rural and remote Australia. Health services and health providers have an important role in reducing premature morbidity and mortality and in improving the health, wellbeing, and quality of life of Australians living in rural and remote areas.

WACRH operates with support from The University of Western Australia (UWA) and works closely with numerous local and national health and community partners.

From the establishment of WACRH, our staff have worked closely with our communities and partners, developing an appreciation of the health and wellbeing needs of the people living in our regions. We have developed, and are continually developing, relationships with key stakeholders that contribute to the health of people in communities and their social environment and inclusiveness. WACRH works closely with local Aboriginal people to establish relationships and trust as a foundation to improved health outcomes of Aboriginal people.

WACRH contributes to the goals of the RHMT program by:

- Actively promoting rural and remote health careers through traditional and lateral entry pathways.
- Creating innovative high quality rural and remote practicum placements for health students.
- Supporting rural health professionals to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.
- Providing education, training, and support programs relevant to rural and remote health professional practice.
- Developing an evidence base by undertaking collaborative research and knowledge translation with a particular focus on health service delivery, public health and Aboriginal health.
- Maximising value from the resources invested in us to support community health and wellbeing and improve service delivery.



UWA Regional Strategy

UWA has adopted a Regional Strategy with pillars that align with the WACRH vision and our efforts. We look forward to supporting its implementation and the benefits it brings to regional Western Australia.

UWA Regional Strategy Principles

- We engage with regional communities to advance the prosperity and aspiration of all Western Australian people.
- We recognise the unique position of Aboriginal peoples as the first nations of Western Australia and their contributions to the State and UWA.
- Our diverse UWA community, and our impact in the regions, is promoted and celebrated.
- We enhance equity through access, participation and opportunities in education, research and community engagement.
- Our campuses, staff and students are connected across Western Australia.
- We act with purpose and awareness, ensuring the work we do is sustainable for future generations.



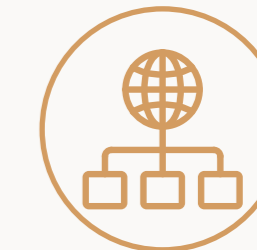
UWA Regional Strategy Pillars



Cultivate innovative partnerships and community engagement



Promote regional, rural and remote experiences



Enhance digital connectivity



Embed Indigenous knowledge protocols to strengthen engagement with and outcomes, for Aboriginal communities



Facilitate a vibrant and inclusive student experience



Meet regional education and research needs



Our Vision

Optimal health and wellbeing for people living in rural and remote communities in Western Australia.

Our Guiding Values

Inclusivity

We acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of our staff, students and our communities.

Integrity

We have a strong work ethic, exercise sound judgement, and are honest, reliable and trusted.



Collaboration

We work in partnership with communities and organisations to progress change.

Scholarship

We undertake rigorous research and evaluation which informs our programs, teaching and advocacy for change.

How We Achieve Our Values

- Work collaboratively with our School and UWA, our partners, our professional networks and our communities.
- Support communities to identify their needs, and work with them to improve their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing.
- Commit to continuous improvement and reflective practice to learn and extend our reach.
- Invest in learning opportunities for students that increases their knowledge of rural and remote communities.
- Foster an organisational environment that provides opportunities for all to grow and excel.
- Work with Aboriginal and underserved communities and groups to build on strengths and work at a systems level to address disadvantage.
- Advocate for the resources and facilities that are needed within WACRH and the community.



WACRH at a Glance

WACRH staff recognise that WA is a highly diverse community, and that geographical distances, availability of health care professionals, and sustainability of the workforce are major challenges.

We see our role as a collaborator with other UDRHs working together to serve regional, rural, and remote communities. Our footprint includes our main offices in the regional cities in our two regions: Geraldton in the Midwest and Karratha in the Pilbara, plus premises in Carnarvon, Newman, Mount Magnet, Mullewa, Port Hedland and Roebourne.

We aim to influence change in health service delivery and health workforce models through innovative teaching and learning opportunities completion and dissemination of quality research and evaluation, advocacy, and community engagement.

Our Priority Areas

WACRH has four priority work areas:



Teaching and Learning



Research and Evaluation

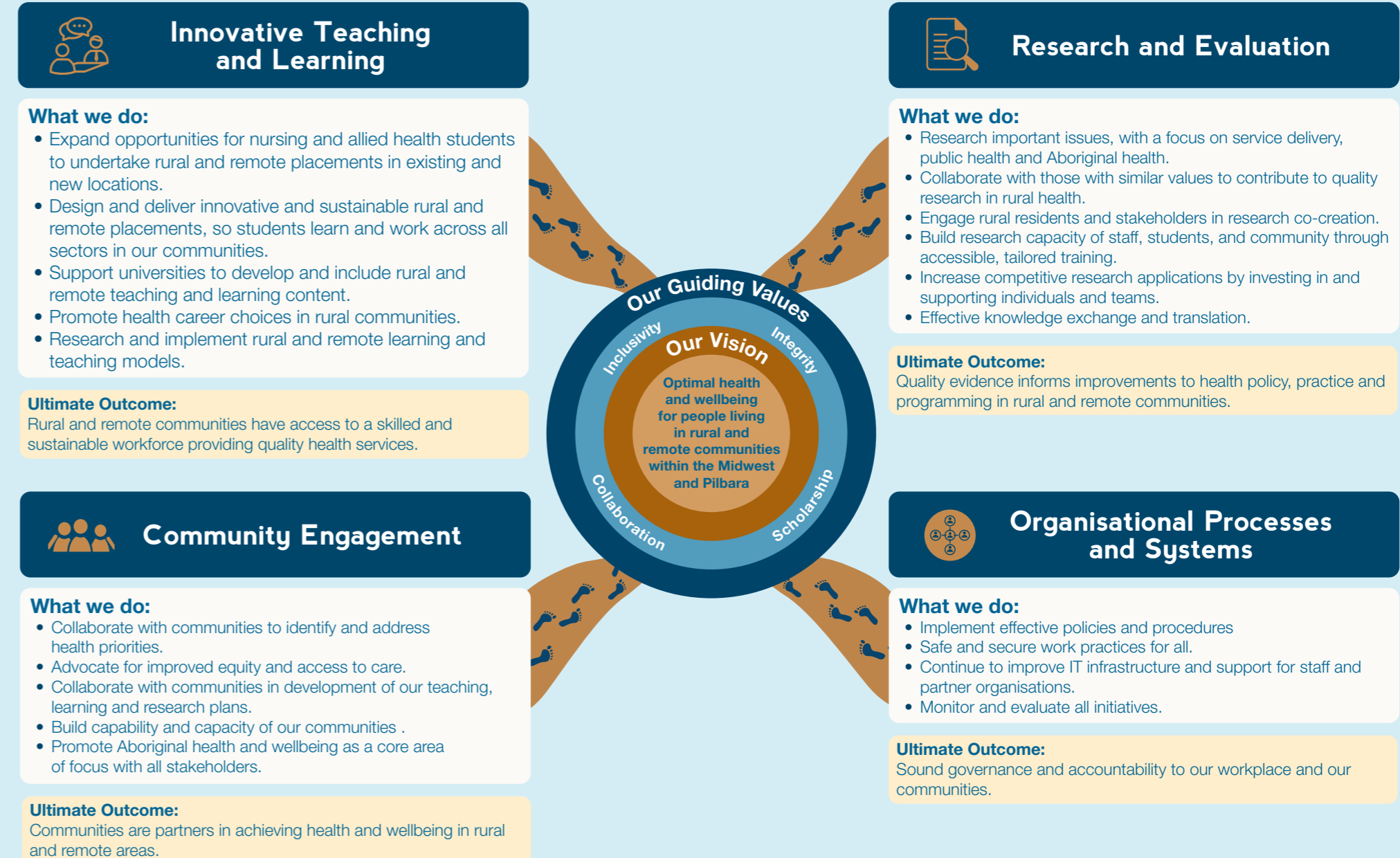


Community and Engagement



Organisational Processes and Systems.

WACRH at a Glance





Innovative Teaching and Learning

Ultimate Outcome

Rural and remote communities have access to a skilled and sustainable workforce providing quality health services.

What we do

- Ensure rural health is a key focus within the health sciences in UWA and other state and national academic institutions with whom we partner.
- Expand opportunities for nursing and allied health students to undertake rural and remote placements in existing and new locations.
- Attract and support health students interested in addressing rural health priorities before and after graduation, and delivering health promotion, public health and community development programs.
- Design and deliver innovative and sustainable rural and remote placements for students, including service-learning opportunities and partnerships with rural and remote service providers, so students learn and work across all sectors in our communities.
- Positively influence rural and remote community engagement for nursing and allied health students through increased placement length and through working in remote settings.
- Research, evaluate, develop, implement and disseminate/share learning and teaching models suited for rural and remote practice and learning environments.
- Work across the rural health pipeline to promote and enable health career choices within our communities through partnerships with schools, vocational education institutions and Aboriginal organisations.

Key priorities for 2023–2027

- Work collaboratively with UWA School of Allied Health to ensure the curriculum is fit for purpose and supports regionalisation of UWA courses.
- Strengthen existing partnerships within WA and actively collaborate with other UDRHs to enhance joint opportunities for innovative teaching and learning.
- Work in collaboration with partner organisations, including service providers, education providers, students and professionals, to enhance the health and wellbeing of the communities we serve.
- Support universities to embed rural and remote content in their curricula and ensure student selection for quality student learning and teaching experiences in rural and remote areas that meets the health and wellbeing needs of our communities.
- Design, deliver, evaluate and share pedagogical approaches for teaching and learning in rural and remote areas including interprofessional learning and models of clinical supervision.
- Focus where possible on program-based rather than discipline-specific planning, reflecting WACRH's commitment to working interprofessionally to address the identified priorities of underserved communities.
- Seek appropriate funding for resources and infrastructure to grow our education programs in rural and remote areas of the Pilbara and Midwest.

Specific Targets

1. Implement a multi-university partnership with other WA universities and relevant employers to collaboratively plan placement programs for rural students across WA UDRHs.
2. Support course changes within UWA that favour the development of health professional courses in priority professions and support the enrolment and academic success of rural residents as students.
3. Implement innovative longer duration nursing student placements in remote communities that meet students' required learning while enabling immersion in the community and developing skills in areas of high workforce need.



“We expand opportunities for nursing and allied health students to undertake rural and remote placements in existing and new placement locations.”



Research and Evaluation

Ultimate Outcome

Quality evidence informs improvements to health policy, practice and programming in rural and remote communities.

What we do

- Conduct research on issues that are important to health professionals and to our communities, with a particular focus on health service delivery, public health, and Aboriginal health.
- Collaborate with universities, organisations and people with similar research values and aims, including across the RHMT network, to ensure we contribute to high quality and important research relevant to rural health and wellbeing.
- Engage with rural communities and consumers in the co-creation and conduct of research and evaluation.
- Build the research capability of staff, agency partners, students, and our communities through delivering tailored training and ensuring access to a range of relevant learning opportunities.
- Increase competitive research applications and success by carefully investing and supporting individuals and teams.
- Enhance research outcomes through publishing and translating research and evaluation findings that address the information needs and purposes of key groups.

Key priorities for 2023–2027

- Ensure we deliver on competitive research grant applications where we are named investigators.
- Strengthen the relationship with WA Country Health Service (WACHS), local councils and community organisations to ensure our research is useful to, and valued by, key stakeholders and contributes to the health and wellbeing of rural and remote communities.
- Build research capability in staff, students and other stakeholders including in co-design and working with consumers.
- Create and support opportunities for Aboriginal people to develop research skills and lead research.
- Develop and sustain research in those areas where we have existing research interest and activity:
 - Prevention of family violence and better support for individuals experiencing and practitioners dealing with related to family and gender-based violence.
 - Improving communication at the practitioner and patient interface, for example through training of health providers (clinical yarning), and health literacy interventions.
- Relevant intervention research related to healthy environments and systemic solutions.

- Child health including support for children with disability and those who have experienced trauma.
- Issues of ageing including better care delivery in residential and community aged care settings in rural and remote areas and through supporting older Australians.
- Community wellbeing and mental health including through support for health promotion and community development interventions in priority areas such a healthy nutrition and physical activity.
- Relevant educational research including around improving student learning for rural practice and the impact of WACRH-delivered programs.
- Aboriginal empowerment and leadership.



Specific targets

1. Support at least two WACRH staff members to enrol in a higher degree by research and increased enrolment/completion of rurally based students working with WACRH researchers.
2. Increase the number of WACRH academic staff named as investigators on funded competitive research.
3. Enhance WACRH researchers understanding of the importance of consumer and community engagement by utilising training and services of the WA Consumer and Community Involvement Program.

“ We conduct research on issues that are important to health planning and delivery, health professionals and to our communities. ”





Community and Engagement

Ultimate Outcome

Communities are partners in achieving health and wellbeing in rural and remote areas.

What we do

- Engage and collaborate with communities to identify health priorities and develop health and social care models which address identified needs.
- Advocate for improved equity and access for rural and remote communities through engagement and partnerships.
- Collaborate with communities in the development of our teaching, learning, and research plans to ensure our activities contribute to community health and wellbeing.
- Build capability and capacity of our communities, including through supporting digital literacy, to lead improvements to rural and remote health and wellbeing.
- Promote Aboriginal health and wellbeing as a core area of focus with all stakeholders.

Key priorities for 2023–2027

- Lead implementation of place-based programs and services in remote sites including Carnarvon, Mt Magnet, Mullewa and Roebourne to address health needs identified within these communities.
- Develop and expand relationships with stakeholders to enhance support in the disability and aged care sectors.
- Contribute to building healthy and safe communities.
- Work with key partners (including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, Aboriginal Corporations, WA Country Health Service, WA Primary Health Alliance, Rural Health West and all levels of government) to support the health and wellbeing priorities of local communities in our regions.
- Advocate for improved access to health services in the communities that we serve.

Specific Targets

1. Establish firm and stable bases for sustaining community programs in Mullewa and Roebourne.
2. Advocate for opportunities to expand community programs in Carnarvon to address the needs of children and young people in that setting.



“ We build capacity and capability of our communities to lead improvements to rural and remote health and wellbeing. ”



Organisational Processes and Systems

Ultimate Outcome

Sound governance and accountability to our workplace and our communities.

What we do

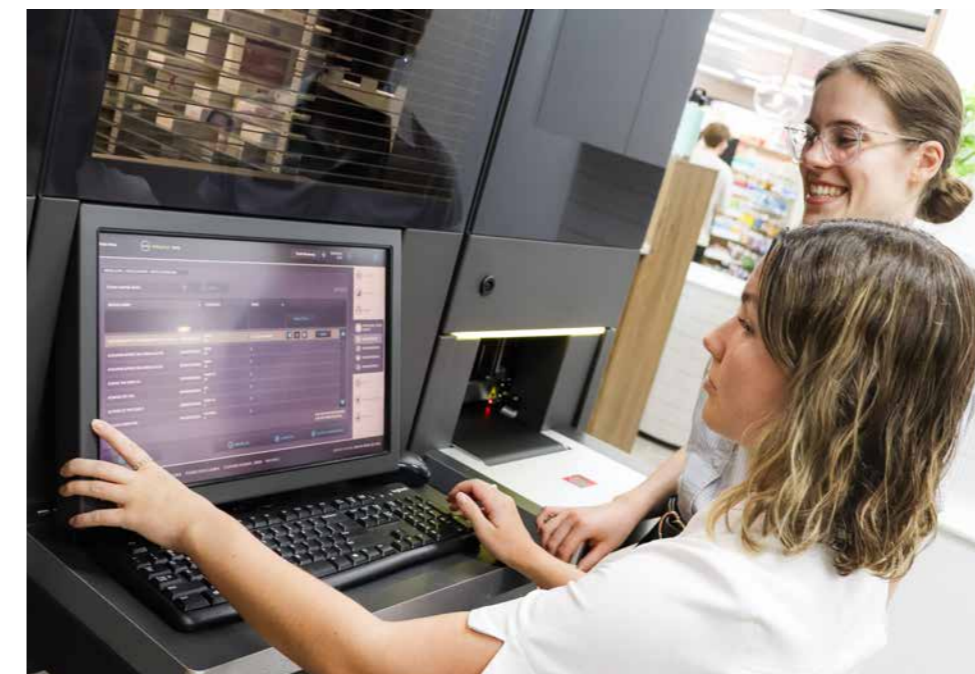
- Establish and implement effective organisational structures, policies and procedures.
- Create a safe and inclusive work environment for all.
- Develop facilities that will meet WACRH's needs into the future.
- Effectively implement and use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions and systems that facilitate and contribute to efficient communication and processes.
- Monitor and evaluate our approaches.
- Advocate to UWA and funders for improvements and efficiencies in policies and procedures that support the business of WACRH.

Key priorities 2023–2027

- Review the current organisational structure to ensure it provides a robust framework to support staff including those based remotely.
- Improve ICT infrastructure and training to enable enhanced communication across sites.
- Streamline data and document management across WACRH.
- Review our website and communication strategies to ensure that information is accessible and that WACRH's strengths and achievements are highlighted.
- Consider issues of sustainability and efficiency in policies and planning.
- Actively contribute to annual Integrated Planning Exercise as part of UWA to promote rural and regional issues.

Specific Targets

1. Plan for and achieve a world class facility for integrated health education delivery in Karratha to meet community needs and health workforce training.
2. Ensure staff orientation and training is aligned with WACRH and UWA policies, meeting staff and organisational priorities.
3. Incrementally implement, when possible, renewable energy and low environmental impact options.



“ We create a safe and inclusive work environment for all. ”



Looking Ahead

Our vision for our next horizon is to strengthen our organisation and staff in all aspects and to model collaboration. By doing this we can work more effectively to build the health workforce and embrace and manage emerging opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing for individuals and communities in rural and remote WA.



This painting is titled 'Health and Community Outreach'. It is a collaborative work created by Yamaji Art artists with WA Centre for Rural Health staff in 2017. It signifies our support to rural communities, from ocean to land, promoting health and wellbeing, harmony and connectedness.



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